

pressing issues" faced by Fiji.

Archbishop Mataca Says Elections May be Delayed If the Charter Process is Not Completed

¶3. (SBU) In a speech immediately following Bainimarama's, NCBBF co-chair Catholic Archbishop Mataca urged Australia, New Zealand and other countries to financially support the Charter process. "If Australia and New Zealand are really concerned with the future of democracy and rule of law in Fiji," he said, "they should provide resources to support the People's Charter, in addition to support for the election in March, 2009." "The People's Charter is important to the credibility of the election," said Mataca. "I am concerned that if the work on the Charter is prolonged through lack of resources, this could threaten our ability to have the election at the scheduled time."

Chaudhry Weighs In

¶4. (SBU) Interim Finance Minister Chaudhry also chimed in 3/27. The Charter, he said, is crucial for Fiji. "Elections should come after the Charter has been formulated and put to the people, and finally endorsed." The international community needs to understand, he said, that elections in themselves are not the solutions to the problems Fiji faces.

IG Insists the Charter Process is Independent; The Facts Say Otherwise

¶5. (SBU) In his 3/27 speech Bainimarama emphasized that the People's Charter process is independent of the Interim

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Government. "You know as a fact that by now that we, the Interim Government, do not direct your discussions or manipulate your discussions, nor the work being done by the Task Teams, the Working Groups and the Technical Secretariat." A recent decision by Charter's Technical and

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Support Secretariat to exclude former Police Commissioner Isikia Savua from the Charter process clearly calls into question Bainimarama's claims. Savua, a former high ranking military officer, was reportedly asked by the Secretariat to compile a report on the military earlier this month. Soon after he sent over a draft report March 13, he was informed by the Secretariat that his participation in the Charter was no longer needed. Savua said that according to the Secretariat, "someone had objected to my participation vis a

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vis the military." Savua told reporters, "it makes me think - do they want people who tell them what they need to know, or do they want people who tell them what they want to know."

Comment - A Challenge to the Forum Ministers

¶6. (SBU) The statements from Bainimarama, Mataca and Chaudhry challenge two of the major points made by Forum Foreign Ministers in Auckland - that the IG should ensure the Charter does not distract from or delay elections, and that elections must be held under the terms of the current constitution. As noted reftel, the Forum ministers put forward a strong, unified message that they expect the IG to fulfill its commitments to hold free and fair elections next year. It appears, however, that many in the IG are still seeking a way to back out of those commitments.

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